ELL Reader

Social Studies

Social Studies

Roberto Clemente

by Johnnie Burton





Genre	Build Background	Access Content	Extend Language
Biography	• Personal Challenges • Baseball • Achievement	• Captions • Chart • Historical Photographs • Definitions	• Baseball Expressions

Scott Foresman Reading Street 5.1.4

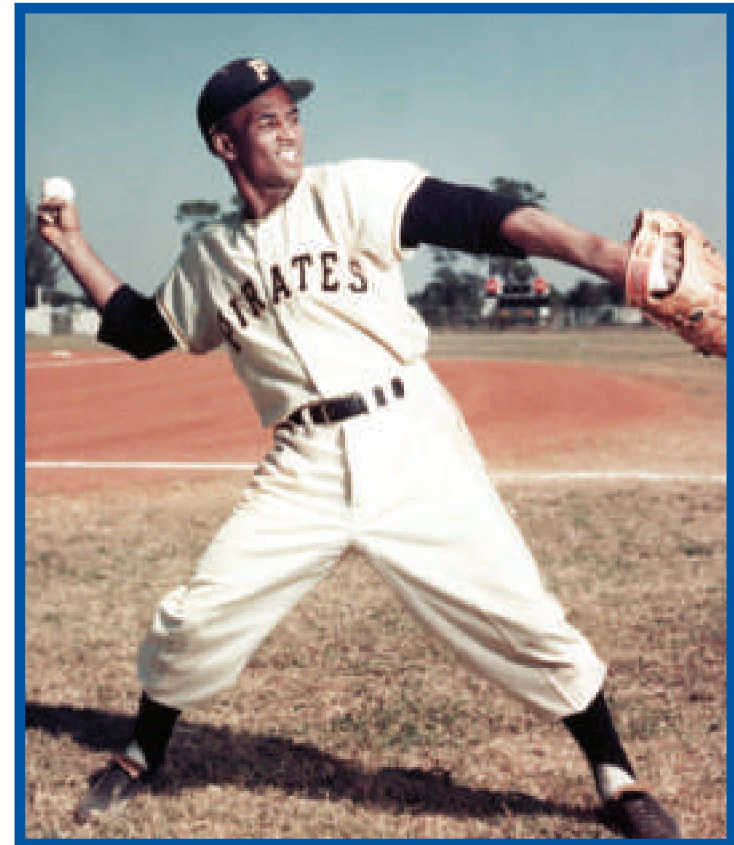
PEARSON
Scott Foresman
scottforesman.com

ISBN 0-328-14220-4
9 780328 142200 90000



Roberto Clemente

by Johnnie Burton





Editorial Offices: Glenview, Illinois • Parsippany, New Jersey • New York, New York
Sales Offices: Needham, Massachusetts • Duluth, Georgia • Glenview, Illinois
Coppell, Texas • Sacramento, California • Mesa, Arizona



President Taft throwing out the first ball at a baseball game in 1910.



Roberto Clemente

A century ago, baseball was becoming very popular in the United States. Every day, people would read about the latest game in the newspaper. They went to baseball games and watched their favorite players. Many children played baseball all day long, until it was too dark to see the ball.

The love of baseball spread across the United States. It spread to other countries, too, especially around the Caribbean Sea. In Puerto Rico, one boy who never wanted to stop playing baseball was Roberto Clemente.





Roberto Clemente Walker was born on August 18, 1934, in Carolina, Puerto Rico. Roberto's family did not have much money for food, so Roberto and his friends made their own baseball equipment. They used branches of guava trees as bats. Knotted rags or flattened cans were used as baseballs. With this equipment, Roberto and his friends played baseball all day long. They even played in the winter. In Puerto Rico, it's warm enough to play baseball all year.

When Roberto was thirteen years old, something important happened. Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play in the major leagues. Until then, only white players were allowed in the major leagues. Now people of different races had a chance to play in the major leauges. Roberto Clemente wanted to play with the best players in the world.



Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. He was the first African American player in the major leagues.

major leagues: highest ranking groups of baseball teams



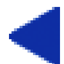


Clemente played for the Santurce *Cangrejeros* before he was discovered by Major League Baseball scouts, people who try to find new baseball players.



Roberto's first chance to prove himself came in high school. A school coach ran a softball team and asked Roberto to join it. Roberto's coach thought that Roberto was the best player he had ever seen.

Later, Roberto's coach encouraged Roberto to try out for a professional baseball team that played in the Puerto Rican Winter League. Every year, when the major leagues ended their season, the Winter Leagues were just getting started. They played their games in warm cities around the Caribbean. Major League Baseball scouts traveled to the Caribbean to look for new players.







When Roberto was seventeen, baseball scouts from the Brooklyn Dodgers came to see him play. Seventy-two players came to show their skills. By the end of the day, everyone had been sent home except Roberto. The scouts noticed that Roberto had a very strong throwing arm and that he could hit the ball very hard. The scouts also noticed that Roberto was an impatient hitter. He would swing at almost every pitch. The scouts could see that Roberto had great skills, but he needed more coaching.

According to league rules, the Dodgers could not offer Roberto a contract until he was eighteen years old. But there was no such rule for the Puerto Rican Winter League. Soon Roberto was making $40 a week playing baseball. By his second year Roberto was becoming a star. The Dodgers offered him $10,000 to join their organization. Roberto accepted. He hoped to be playing in Brooklyn soon.



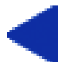


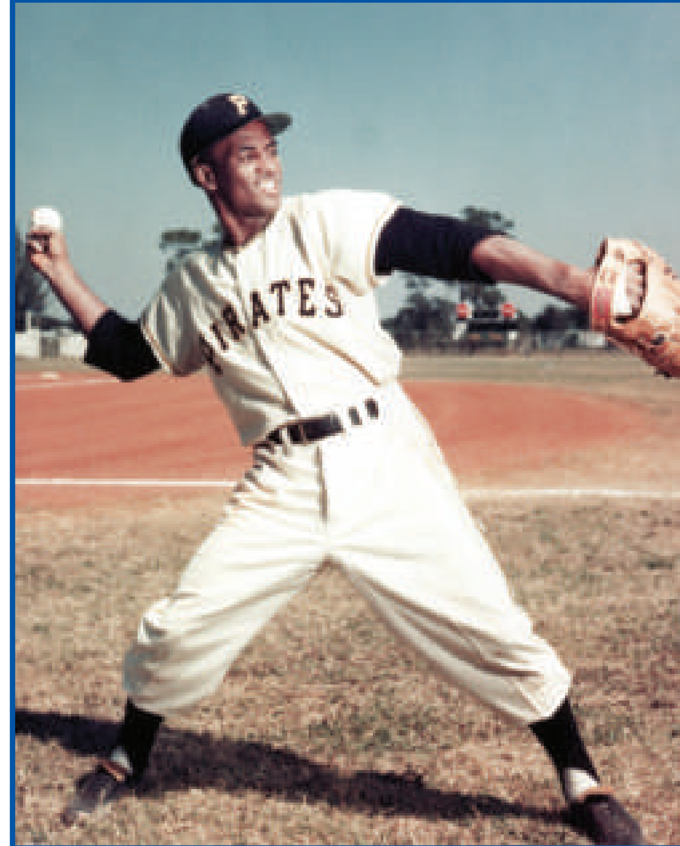
In Puerto Rico, playing baseball had always been fun for Roberto. That changed after he signed his contract with the Dodgers. They sent him to play for a minor league team in Montreal, Canada. The minor leagues are for players who need more practice before they can play in the major leagues. Roberto was unhappy in Canada. It was cold there, and he was lonely. He spoke little English, the language of most of his team, and almost no one around him spoke Spanish.

His biggest problem, however, was not the weather or the loneliness. Roberto was not playing the game he loved. He just sat on the bench waiting for a chance to play. When he finally got to play, strange things would happen. If he started to have a good day, he would be taken out of the game. If he was having a bad day, he would be left in. It was almost as if they wanted him to fail.

The Dodgers already had a star right fielder. They kept Roberto from playing much so that he would not attract the attention of other teams.









Roberto played his entire major league career with the Pirates.



When Roberto finally understood what the Dodgers were doing, he was angry and hurt. Luckily, he was able to change teams. In 1954, he was chosen by the Pittsburgh Pirates, and he began a wonderful career that would last eighteen seasons.

At the beginning of his career, some people treated Roberto Clemente poorly because of the color of his skin. This racism, or unfair treatment because of his race, surprised Roberto. His skin color had not been a problem when he was growing up in Puerto Rico. This new problem hurt and confused him, but it made him more determined to succeed.





Baseball fans use numbers to compare players. One important number is the *batting average.*

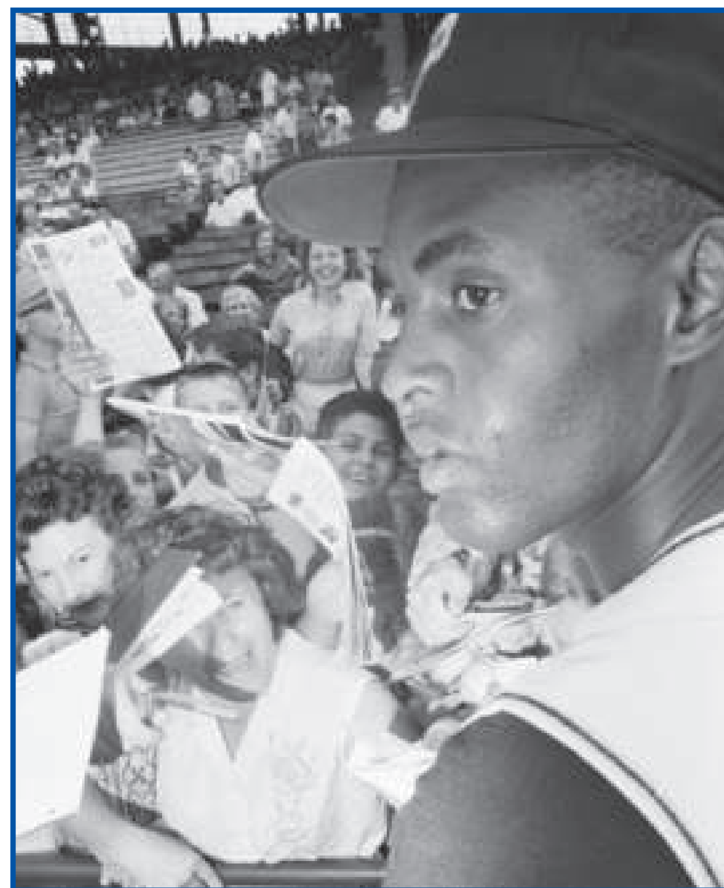
A batting average is the number of hits a player gets divided by the number of chances to hit. The answer is given as a three-place decimal. For example, a .250 hitter makes one hit in every four chances. A hit is the act of hitting the baseball and running at least to first base without the other team stopping you. A batting average of .250 is a different way to write 25%.

To understand Roberto Clemente's baseball career, you must know the difference between good and bad batting averages. Study the batting average chart before reading on.



Batting Average Chart

Batting Average	Explanation
.400 Superior	It is a great achievement to hit .400. In all of baseball history, only fourteen players have done it.
.350 Excellent	Most years, at least a few players hit .350 or better. Some have done it often.
.300 Very Good	A ".300 hitter" is often used to mean "a very good hitter." Most teams will have at least one .300 hitter—some will have several.
.250 Fair	A .250 average is not very good. To stay in the major leagues, a .250 hitter must have a special skill such as hitting lots of home runs or being a very talented fielder.
.200 Poor	Any player who hits .200 or less for very long may not play in the major leagues for long.





Roberto quickly became one of the most popular Pirates players.



Roberto's first season with the Pittsburgh Pirates was in 1955. At first, he had great success—early in the season his batting average was .367. But soon the other teams found out that he was an impatient hitter. Pitchers learned to use this weakness against Roberto, and he finished the season hitting only .255.

Luckily for Roberto, the hitting coach for the Pirates was George Sisler. As a player, Sisler had been one of the greatest hitters of all time. George helped Roberto learn to be more patient, and the next year he hit .311.



As he improved his hitting, Roberto wanted to improve his fielding. After the rest of the team had finished practice each day, Roberto would continue to work. He would put an empty trash can at third base and use it as a target. He was not satisfied unless he threw the ball into the trash can on a single bounce. His extra effort paid off. Roberto was voted the best fielder at his position twelve years in a row.

Although Roberto was becoming a star, the Pirates were still one of the worst teams in the National League. In 1958, the Pirates began to improve. In 1960, the Pirates were the best team in their league. That year the Pirates played in the World Series and beat the New York Yankees to become the champions. Roberto helped the team by hitting a .314 batting average.



World Series: series of baseball games played each fall between the two championship teams of the major leagues





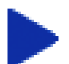


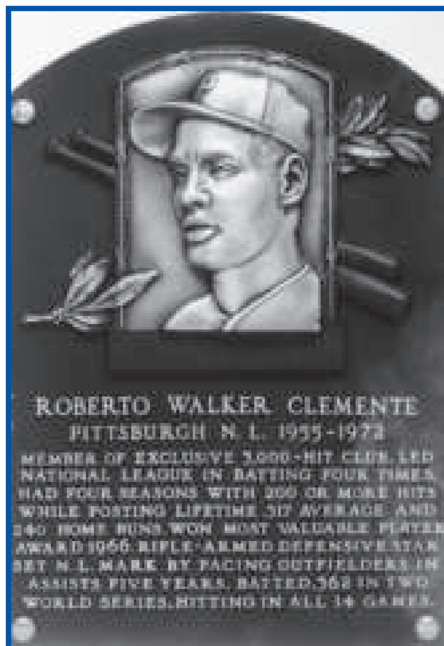
Roberto hits a home run in the 1971 World Series.



The next year, Roberto was determined to be even better. In 1961 he led the league with a .351 batting average. In 1966, he was voted the most valuable player for the season by adding twenty-nine home runs to his .317 average. The next year, he led the league again with a .357 average. Unfortunately, the Pirates team was not successful during those years.

Finally, in 1971 Roberto and the Pirates were both very successful. Once again, the Pirates played in the World Series. This time Roberto hit two home runs, batted a .414 average, and made spectacular plays in the outfield. He was voted the most valuable player of the World Series that year.





Roberto Clemente's plaque at the Baseball Hall of Fame.



On September 30, 1972, Roberto Clemente did something only ten major league players had done before him. He made the 3,000th hit of his career.

That year, a terrible earthquake hit the country of Nicaragua. Roberto wanted to bring relief supplies to the earthquake victims. He heard that some of the supplies were not being given out quickly enough. He traveled on a supply airplane to Nicaragua to help. But on December 31, 1972, the plane crashed. There were no survivors.

During the next season the Pirates wore arm patches with Roberto's number 21 on their sleeves. Later that year, he became the first Spanish-speaking player honored in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Roberto Clemente was a hero both on and off the playing field.





Talk About It

1. What did Roberto Clemente have to overcome to become a big baseball star?
2. What do you think of his effort to help people in need?

Write About It

3. Write about some of the things you admire about Roberto Clemente on a separate sheet of paper.

Extend Language

Many baseball words and expressions are used in everyday conversation. Looking at the chart below, can you tell what is the everyday meaning of the baseball expression *strike out?*

Baseball Expression	Baseball Meaning	Everyday Meaning
hit a home run	To hit the ball over the outfield wall. The batter runs around all of the bases and scores.	To do something great
strike out	To swing the bat at a pitched baseball three times and miss each time. The batter's turn is over.	

Photographs
Every effort has been made to secure permission and provide appropriate credit for photographic material. The publisher deeply regrets any omission and pledges to correct errors called to its attention in subsequent editions.

Cover ©Bettmann/Corbis; **1** ©MLB Photos/Getty Images; **2** ©Bettmann/Corbis; **3** ©Bettmann/Corbis; **4** ©MLB Photos/Getty Images; **5** (TL, TC, TR) ©Getty Images; **6** (BL, BC, BR) ©Getty Images; **7** ©MLB Photos/Getty Images; **9** ©Bettmann/Corbis; **10** ©MLB Photos/Getty Images; **11** ©Bettmann/Corbis; **12** ©Bettmann/Corbis.

ISBN: 0-328-14220-4

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 V0G1 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05